INTRODUCTORY PAPER UPON ASSYRIAN GRAMMAR.

Assyrian was the tongue of the inhabitants of the district extending from the shores of the Persian Gulf on the south, to Armenia on the north, and from Elam and Persia on the east, to Phœnicia on the west. The people who spoke this language formed, originally, one nation, but split, in ancient times, into two, each having its own king. Notwithstanding, however, this separation, and the enmity which these two nations afterwards bore toward each other, the speech of each remained, even to the last, practically the same, the differences being so slight as hardly to amount to provincialisms.

An examination of the construction of the Assyrian language, presented to us in the numerous inscriptions, indicates that the people who spoke it were early separated from intercourse with the other Semitic tribes, and their language, therefore, struck out a course especially its own, and the difference between Assyrian and the other Semitic tongues is often very great It is especially in the verbs that this departure is to be seen, and for this reason it has been thought well to treat of them first.

If it be really the case that the so-called permansive tense is a late formation (and there is every reason to regard it as such), then the same must be said for the corresponding tense (the perfect) in the other Semitic languages. Even at the time when the separation of the various tribes took place, however, the tendency to form this tense existed, and it was then most likely in full use, but confined to the third person. To the latest times any participle form could be used in Assyrian as a permansive, and take the endings of that tense. Another departure from the usage of the Semitic tongues, is the partial change of meaning of the forms in *u* (in Hebrew the Pual and Hophal, and in Arabic the passive forms of the various conjugations). Assyrian most likely had, at first, both the ordinary forms, and those having *u* as the vowel, but without any distinctive meaning, at least such as is found in Hebrew and Arabic. The examples of these forms which exist, that is, forms having the vowel *u* between the first and second radicals, or after the voice-formative, are only to be found in the infinitive and permansive of the intensive (Piel) stem, and the same tenses of the Shaphel. These forms have almost wholly replaced those in *a*, and have not necessarily a passive meaning.

Other verbal differences also exist. The primitive forms, in Assyrian, are to be found, to a great extent, in the various other Semitic tongues, the chief difference being that the Shaphel conjugation is in full use. The most striking thing, however, is the regular use not only of those secondary forms which insert the letter *t*, but also of those longer and more interesting tertiary forms which insert the particle *tan*, indicating either speed or frequency.

To the above list of interesting verbal differences may be added the strange Niphal forms of those verbs weak of the first radical, in which the *n* either with or without a vowel between, is doubled—evidently indicating a nazalization of the vowel representing the lost or weakened consonant; and those secondary (and tertiary) Niphal-forms which, dropping their *n* before the inserted *t*, will perhaps, help to explain the Hebrew Niphal infinitive (הִקָּטֵל). The importance, also, of the real tense-distinctions attached to the long and short forms of the imperfect. can-

not be overlooked, and it is proposed, in these papers, to give many examples of their use for comparison.

Assyrian is also much richer in pronominal roots than the other Semitic tongues. For the first person singular of the personal pronoun, for example, no less than six words or forms are to be found, and for the second person singular the same number. The greater part of those expressing the first person are form-ed from the root *iau*, and this word being, as it really seems, the Assyrian repre-sentative of the Heb. הָיָה "to be," shows how, clashing with the Assyrian form of the word Jehovah (*iau*), the divine name fell into disuse in Assyrian, and was replaced by *ilu*, a word probably of Akkadian origin. The importance of Assyrian in the science of Semitic philology will therefore readily be seen.

The Assyrian tongue seems, in the earliest times, to have been that of the inhabitants of the south or Babylonia. Large colonies, however, were probably sent out northwards, and the language was, in this way, taken almost as far as the mountains of Armenia. Long before this emigration the Assyrian (or, to speak more correctly, Babylonian) language came into contact with a speech of an entire-ly different character and genius—the Akkadian, and its dialect, Sumerian. It can easily be understood, therefore, that, as the two peoples were in close contact, the Assyrian language became greatly changed, a number of foreign words being introduced, and the grammar being, to a certain extent, modified, and made some-thing like that of the Akkado-Sumerian language. Assyrian, however, kept to the last its distinctly Semitic character, and, while taking in freely words borrow-ed from the Akkadian, nevertheless retained in use most of the Semitic equiva-lents of those words, so that it was seldom needful to draw from a foreign source except for the purpose of bringing greater elegance into the composition.

Assyrian, like most other tongues, had dialects, but, in consequence of the newness of the study, their peculiarities are not easily detected. Most of the texts come from Nineveh and Babylon, and only give, therefore, examples of the lan-guage spoken at those places. Judging from these texts, one would say that not only the spelling, but also the composition of the phrases are based, to a great ex-tent, upon tradition and usage, the style being modelled upon ancient translations of the Sumerian and Akkadian records, of which both nations had copies, and for this reason not only the written, but also the spoken language, seems hardly to have differed. It was in Assyria, however, that the clearer and purer pronuncia-tion was kept, and a more careful use of the case-endings of the nouns, &c., ob-served. The true folk-speech is undoubtedly to be found in those interesting letter-tablets in which the people are to be seen in the more ordinary occupations of life, though not entirely apart from officialism. It is in this popular language that those ground-texts of the science of Assyriology, the Achæmenian inscrip-tions, are composed.

In the very cities, however, where the classical language was most used, seems to have been a tongue, or, rather a form of speech, of a rougher kind, in use among the trading population. How far this language really differed from the literary language it is impossible to say, for the texts which have come down to us contain only the technical terms of trade needful to the occupation of the people, and a free use is also made of those ideographs which render the language, at times, so puzzling to the modern student.

In Babylonia, these trade-documents were always written by the professional
scribe, who belonged, at least to some extent, to the learned class, and who
observed, therefore, the traditions which he had learnt at school. This custom of
employing professional scribes was also, most likely, in force in Assyria. These
scribes seem to have possessed, besides the Assyrian or wedge writing, also a
knowledge of the Phœnician characters, as the dockets sometimes written on the
edge of these trade-tablets show. To these documents and their Phœnician
legends, as well as to the correspondence-tablets, must we look in order to gain an
insight into the tongue of the more common people of those ancient empires.
These trade-dockets also indicate that not only (as shown by the bilingual lists and
syllabaries) were the Assyrians aware of the triliteralism of their language, but
that they also had a knowledge, in some cases, of the original forms of their own
weakened verbal roots.—*Theo. J. Pinches, in the Proceedings of the Society of Biblical
Archæology.*

⇒EDITORIAL ⁘ NOTES.⇐

The Last Number.—Those of us who are immediately interested in the success
of THE HEBREW STUDENT feel very grateful for the kind reception accorded to
the last number. Many letters and notices of a complimentary nature have been
received. If there had remained a doubt as to the wisdom of the undertaking, or
as to the demand for such a journal, that doubt has been dispelled. If we may
believe what is said,—and why may we not believe it—there is a work to be done
which can be done only by a periodical of this character. It is for us, therefore,
to go on and, in spite of the many difficulties which, of necessity, beset such an
undertaking, to continue the work in the line, and according to the policy marked
out.

It was a surprise that the import of the editorial on *Scholarly Ministers* in the
last number should have been misunderstood, as it seems to have been. In ascer-
taining the meaning of a writer, many things must be considered, e. g., the time,
circumstances, the nature of the subject, the character of the writer, etc., etc.
Would a journal, whose sole purpose it is to incite ministers to study, and to be
scholarly, encourage them to avoid scrupulously the study of *all texts* in order that
they may be saved the trouble of considering the various views which have been
propounded? Perhaps editorials should not be ironical.

In this connection it is but right to apologize for the miserable proof-reading
done in the case of Prof. Newman's article: *Professor Strack on the Pentateuch.*
"Regard," p. 151 (line 10 from bottom), should have been "regards;" on p. 152,
"investigations" (line 16 from bottom), should have been "investigation;"
"Tracer" (line 6 from bottom), "traces." On p. 153, "their" (line 9 from top),
should have been "these," and "undeniably" (line 9 from bottom), should have
been "undeniable." Our proof-reader, it is to be hoped, will hereafter exercise
more care.

Notes From Abroad.—We feel confident that our readers will appreciate and
be profited by the Notes from Germany, published in this number. It is recogniz-